

Mr. *L A W*'s
UNLAWFULNESS

OF THE
STAGE *Entertainment*

EXAMIN'D:

AND

The Insufficiency of his Arguments fully
demonstrated.

By *S. PHILOMUSUS*, M.A.



L O N D O N,

Printed: And Sold by J. ROBERTS, in
Warwick-Lane. 1726.
[Price 6 Pence.]

Harvard College Library
Shapleigh Fund
July 21, 1942

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

Mr. LAW's
Unlawfulness of the STAGE
 ENTERTAINMENT *examin'd.*

I Am sensible how little Encouragement there is at present for writing Pamphlets, by the Smallness of the Number of Good Ones that appears among us. Accordingly, this was undertaken without the least mercenary View; and, if it falls into no other than the Hands of such whose Judgments have been perverted by the Treatise it is intended to confute, I shall be satisfied. The Prospect of contributing, in ever so slender a Degree, to the Happiness and Welfare of Mankind, is what I am excited by, upon these Occasions.

But I will premise no further, because I am going to censure our Author upon that Account who begins with a sort of an Introduction, letting us know how *sensible* he is that the *Title of his Book will, to the Generality of People, seem too high a Flight; he look'd upon as the Effect of a fanatical Spirit, and carrying Matters higher than the Sobriety of Religion requires:* Upon which, he begs that *such would suspend their Judgment for a while, and be content to read his Treatise, before they pass any Judgment either upon the Merits of the Subject or the Temper of the Writer.*

Now I am of Opinion that it is not of any Concern to the World, what the Temper of this or any

other Writer is; but, if the Tendency of their Writings is like to be prejudicial to Mankind, it is proper they should be taken in hand and examin'd, and the Falſity and Inſufficiency of them expos'd and detected. This muſt be my Apology for meddling with Mr. LAW's Book. For tho' there is nothing of any real Weight or Force in it, yet there is enough to diſtract and perplex the Minds of thoſe who are not us'd to Arguments, to rob them of the Peace and Tranquility of Innocence, and terrify their Souls with the ſhocking Appearance of imaginary Guilt. Neither would the pernicious Miſchief end here; but ſuch Notions as his, if they were to prevail, would be apt to ſpoil the Growth and diſcourage the Uſe of Dramatic Performances; which, in all Ages and Countries in the World, have always been eſteem'd the moſt noble and improving Diversions, that the Mind, at its Hours of Leiſure and Recreation, could be entertain'd with. I ſhall make this appear occaſionally as I go along; intending to examine his Arguments and Demonſtrations, as he calls them, in order as they ly before me.

P. 1. He begins with making a Compariſon between *worſhipping Images*, and *going to Plays*, and thinks that they who own the Unlawfulneſs of the one, ought to be convinc'd of the Sinfulneſs of the other. This is his firſt Argument, and takes up the Five firſt Pages of his Book. The Inſufficiency of which the Reader may eaſily perceive from the following Particulars. 1. *Worſhipping Images* is certainly a great and notorious Sin, being not only contrary to an expreſs Command of God, but to common Senſe and Reaſon; and therefore, in ſome meaſure, criminal even in mere Heathens. But *going to Plays*, in general, is no where forbidden in Scripture, nor in any reſpect contrary to Senſe and Reaſon, but rather agree-

agreeable to both. 2. The Author in this Place, and indeed throughout his whole Book, begs the Question which he ought to prove, *that it is sinful to go to a Play*. Whenever that can be made appear, I will joyn my Endeavours in dissuading the World from it, as heartily and sincerely as he can do. 3. That there are in some Plays, things which must certainly give Offence to People of a chaste Ear, and refin'd way of Thinking, I cannot deny. But then these are accidental Evils, depending sometimes upon a vicious Poet; sometimes upon an impudent Player, over-acting his Part; and often upon the bad Taste of an Audience, who, generally speaking, have it in their Power to model the Manners of the Stage just as they please, by shewing their Approbation or Dislike upon proper Occasions. But this makes no more against the Lawfulness and Propriety of Stage-Entertainments in general, than a buffoon, ridiculous Preacher would against going to Church. The End of Dramatic Entertainments is, by giving a Picture of some Parts of human Life, to recommend to the Audience the Practice of Honour, Politeness, and in a word, every moral Virtue; and to discourage the Imitation of any thing Scandalous and Disagreeable, by shewing it in its own odious and ridiculous Light. Now if this End is defeated by any of those accidental Abuses I mention'd before, the Guilt of such Indecencies is not to be imputed to any but those who actually commit them, or designedly incourage them: no more than they who go to Church, with an honest Intention of paying their Devotions, are chargeable with the Impertinence, Enthusiasm, Rant and Nonsense, with which they are sometimes entertain'd from the Pulpit. There is no arguing therefore against the Use of a thing in general, from the Abuses of it committed by Particulars: As this Author does, who

who makes no Exceptions; but affirms throughout his whole Book, without the least Shadow of a Proof, that *going to Plays*, in general, is as unlawful and sinful, as *Idolatry*, *Drunkenness*, *Murder*, *Theft*, *Adultery*, and what not; Things, which tho' they had never been forbidden by an exprefs Law from Heaven, are so manifestly and unexceptionably *malum in se*; always unreasonable, always wicked.

To give the Reader a Specimen of his Reasoning, says he (pag. 4.) *You go to hear a Play: I tell you that you go to hear Ribaldry and Profaneness; that you entertain your Mind with extravagant Thoughts, wild Rant, blasphemous Speeches, wanton Amours, profane Jest, and impure Passions. If you ask me, where is the Sin of all this? You may as well ask me where is the Sin of Swearing and Lying. For it is not only a Sin against this or that particular Text of Scripture, but it is a Sin against the whole Nature and Spirit of our Religion. I have transcrib'd this whole Paragraph at once, to give the Reader a View of our Author's way of arguing and thinking upon this Subject. People say, they go to hear a Play; he says, they lye: he knows what they go to hear better than they do themselves. They go upon no other Account, but to hear Ribaldry and Profaneness, and to entertain their Minds with wanton Amours and impure Passions. And, in doing thus, they are guilty of as great Sins as those of Swearing and Lying, &c.*

From this and many other Places in his Treatise, it is manifest that this Author makes it equally as criminal to represent Vices upon the Stage, and be present at the representing them, as actually to perpetrate and commit them. Whereas, in representing the Manners of the Age, in order to expose the Vices and Follies of it, it is necessary the Player should personate Characters of all sorts, and the Audience employ their Minds in thinking and reflecting upon them; which both may do, if they please, as innocently

nocently as *one* may write, and *others* read an History, which gives an Account of the Commission of the most unlawful and detestable Crimes. The Bible itself describes Murders and Adulteries, with most other enormous Sins, in a strong Light: Which I hope may be allow'd to be read, without supposing the Mind of the Reader to be inspired with Sentiments in favour of Cruelty or Lust. According to his way of Arguing, if it is criminal to give a Theatrical Description, of *wanton Amours*, and *impure Passions*, by the same Rule the Actors have been guilty of Murder, Treason, &c. a thousand times over; and the best Part of the King's Subjects have been aiding and assisting to them therein. This single Observation must needs convince the Reader, upon what a wrong mistaken Foundation this Author has built his whole Invektive against Stage Entertainments in general: For as to those real Indecencies, which I deny not but are sometimes to be found in our Theatres, I am far enough from making any Defence or Apology for them; I give them up; and wish with all my Heart the World would agree to be so sensible and well-bred as to explode them all.

And here I shall take leave of my Author's *first* Argument; desiring the Reader to observe, that he has prov'd nothing all this while; but laid down an Assertion, which no one will ever dispute with him, that, *When it is sinful to go to a Play, it is sinful*: for, as to its being generally and always so, tho' he has often affirm'd it, he has not made the least Step towards proving and making it out. I grant that *Entertainments which awaken our disorder'd Passions, and teach to relish Lewdness, immoral Rant, and Prophaneness, are exceeding sinful*, and that People are to be blam'd for being present at them; provided it can be made appear, that such Entertainments were
pre-

prepar'd with such an Intent by the Composers of them; and that accordingly they always and certainly have such an Effect upon the Audience. Otherwise all the Sermons that ever were preach'd against Fornication and Adultery, Riot and Intemperance of any sort, may be said to be *exceeding sinful*; because, they often describe the Nature and Extent of those Crimes; and, by this means, put the Audience in mind of them. But, as no one ever pretended, that Sermons, which treated of such Topics, were, for that Reason only, *exceeding sinful*; neither can the same be said of Plays, written and acted upon the same Account, and consequently producing the same Effects.

Yet how does he triumph, after having done nothing (p. 5.) with a *Thus stands the first Argument against the Stage: It has all the Weight in it, that the whole Weight of Religion can give to any Argument.* And then (p. 6.) with the same triumphal Air he proceeds to his

Secondly, Let the next Argument against the Stage be taken from its manifest Contrariety to this important Passage of Scripture; Let no Communication proceed out of your Mouth, but that which is good to the Use of edifying; that it may minister Grace to the Hearers: and grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are seal'd to the Day of Redemption. Here again, with this pompous Argument, he does nothing but what he did before, beg the Question; by taking it for granted, that all theatrical Entertainments are intended and designed to promote Vice and Immorality. Whereas in all wise and well-ordered Governments, and, I sincerely believe, in our own, they are allowed for a quite contrary End, *viz.* to expose Vice and ill Behaviour of all sorts to the Ridicule and Contempt, and to recommend an honest agreeable Deportment to the Imitation, of the Audience. He
should

should prove, that all Plays were intended with such bad Designs, and generally produce such bad Effects, before he can argue against them as *corrupt Communication*, and as something which is not good to the use of edifying. This he ought to prove in the first place. But, instead of that, he goes a short way to work, and takes it for granted; and then, very demurely, asks this Question: *If it be unlawful to have any corrupt Communication of our own, can we think it lawful to go to Places set apart for that Purpose?* He seems here to have been let into a very great political Secret; which, if true, those concern'd ought not to thank him for the Discovery of, viz. that our Theatres, which are authoriz'd by the Permission, and have been frequently honour'd by the Presence of our Sovereigns, as well as the best of their Subjects, are set apart for no other Purpose but corrupt and unedifying Communication; and for People to be entertained with Oaths and Imprecations, Propbaneness and Impurity of Discourse.

— *Quorsum hæc tam putida tendunt?*

If the Author's Allegations were true, I am ready to grant that neither the Quality nor Character of any Person ought to be us'd as a Skreen to an unlawful Action; but, in the mean time, I shall take the Liberty to charge him with having laid down a very false and seditious Position: in affirming, that the Play-house is a *House set apart for corrupt Communications*.

It is with the same presuming Air, that he goes on (p. 7.) taking it for granted, that Women (who go to Play-houses) frequent such Places to hear Oaths, and give their Money to see Women forget the Modesty of their Sex, and talk impudently in a public Play-house. He should not wonder to see Rakes and ill Women do thus. But for Persons, who profess Purity and Holiness, &c. for them to give their Money to be thus entertained, is such a Contradiction to all Piety and common

Sense, as cannot be sufficiently expos'd. When he is able to prove that the Ladies, who frequent our Theatres, do generally give *their Money* with a Design only to hear Oaths, and see Women forget the Modesty of their Sex, &c. I shall be very ready to grant that this will be *such a Contradiction to all Piety and common Sense as cannot be sufficiently expos'd.* But if they go with a Design to be improv'd, by seeing Virtue, Discretion and Good-breeding agreeably recommended, and Vice and Folly expos'd; I shall think they are no more to answer for some few Indecencies which may happen to be mixed with such Representations, than they, who go to Church to serve God, and to be improv'd by the religious Discourse of a grave Divine, are chargeable with contributing to the treasonable Insinuations, gross Descriptions of irregular Passions, Nonsense and Absurdities, which are sometimes uttered from the Pulpit.

Such hitherto is the poor way of arguing our Author contents himself with; yet he concludes his *second Argument* with his usual Triumph, by saying, (p. 7.) *If therefore I was to rest here, I might fairly say, that I had prov'd the Stage to be as contrary to Scripture, as the Worship of Images is contrary to the second Commandment.* Whereas he has prov'd nothing; but ignorantly taken it for granted, that both Players and Spectators are actually guilty of those innumerable Vices and Follies which are fabulously represented upon the Stage: At which rate, as I observed before, he may as well charge them with the Guilt of Murder, as any thing else.

Let us now, with our Author, (p. 8.) proceed to a *third Argument against the Stage.* And here, according to his former profound way of reasoning, he takes it for granted that *Players were never suspected to be Persons of Christian Piety.* That the Bu-
siness

sinews of a Player is prophane, wicked, lewd and immodest; and challenges any one to shew him that it is a more Christian Employment than that of Robbers. He affirms, that it is abominably sinful, and inconsistent with the Christian Religion; and places it amongst the most abominable Crimes, (p. 9, 10.) and from thence infers (as with good Reason he might, if it were so) that they cannot be innocent who delight in their Sins, and hire them to commit them. This Argument (as he says) is not far-fetch'd, or founded on any Subtleties of Reasoning. No truly; if you eat your Pudding while it is too hot, it will certainly burn you. But to destroy this whole Argument at once, and to answer the Challenge he gives for any one to shew him that the Business of Players is a more Christian Employment than that of Robbers; I shall only put him in Mind, once more, that the Business of a Player is, by thus much, a more Christian Employment than that of a Robber; as it is less criminal in a Painter to paint a Robbery, than actually to commit one; in an Historian, to describe a barbarous and bloody Murder, than actually to be concern'd in it; and in a Clergyman, to represent to his Congregation the odious Appearance and ill Consequences of Lewdness and Drunkenness, than actually to be guilty of those Sins himself. Whether Players are modest or immodest, sober or intemperate off of the Stage, is nothing to our present Purpose; no more than it is for a Lady of nice Virtue to be concern'd whether her Coach-horses are Creatures of a chaste Disposition or not: provided they look well, and carry her with Spirit from one Visit to another, she has no Objection against them. I think Players, as to what concerns their Employment, may be as good Christians as Poets, Painters, Historiographers, or Divines; and have as much Right, as any of these, to represent Lust, Prophaneness, and disordered Passions.

My Knowledge of their private Lives and Conversations is but little. But I can venture to affirm of one of them, with whom I have some Acquaintance, that I don't know a more modest, pious, well-behav'd Christian. Every one who knows Mr. *Mills* will see by this Description that I mean him: Tho' I have good Reason to believe the same might be said of several others among them. But, be that as it will, I can't see the least Reason, nor has our Author discovered the least, why, as Players, they should be accounted *the most vile and abominable Sinners*. Therefore till he proves that representing and describing Sins is as criminal as really committing them, he ought to make a public Recantation of this uncharitable Slander; and ask Forgiveness as well of these injured People, as of the Audience, to whom, by their Presence and Participation, he imputes the same Guilt.

His *fourth Argument* (p. 111.) stands thus: *As the Church is the House of God*, and, by what is there exhibited, tends to the Promotion of Piety and Religion; so the Play-house is *the Devil's House*, where profligate Persons of both Sexes are heating and inflaming one another with all the Wantonness of Address, the Immodesty of Motion, and Lewdness of Thought, that Wit can invent: It is therefore just as wrong to go to the one, as it is right to go to the other. Here, it is to be observed, that he again begs the Question, by supposing the Play-house to be *the Devil's House*, &c. For, in reality, the Play house, when it is not abused, differs no otherwise from the House of God, than that the one is a Place for true Devotion, the other for innocent Diversion and honest Recreation. At one, we do, or ought to, improve our selves; by hearing the Law of God read and explain'd to us; at the other we do, or ought to do, the same; by seeing the Ways of the World represented in a very lively

lively manner; that which is truly commendable, heighten'd and embellish'd with all the Charms that an ingenious Fancy can give it; and that which is really detestable, expos'd and ridicul'd with all the Art and Dexterity that an agreeable Wit can furnish. Thus Plays are, or ought to be: This is the End and Design of them, when they are not perverted and abus'd. However, that they may be, and are sometimes, debas'd to ill Purposes, is no more an Argument against the general Use of them, than it would be against going to Church, because Atheists, Pick-pockets and common Strumpets do sometimes go thither; and Sedition, Nonsense, and Enthusiasm are sometimes preach'd there. Honest, well-meaning People may certainly keep up their Integrity in both Places, and improve themselves proportionably in both; notwithstanding the bad Company they may chance to be mixt with: The Service of God and the Devil, depending, not upon this or that Place merely, but upon the Mind and Inclinations of those that frequent them. Some People serve God at a Play-house, better than others do at Church; and some serve the Devil more at Church, than others do at the Play-house. Pick-pockets and Strumpets are the same where-ever they happen to be.

Tectum non animum mutant. —

He runs on (in p. 14. and 15.) upon this ridiculous Supposition, that the Play-house is *the Devil's House*, and rings the Changes upon his own *Postulatum* with great Pleasure. *If therefore (says he) we may say that a House or Festival was the Devil's, because he was delighted with it; because what was there done, was an acceptable Service to him; we may be assured that the Play-house is as really the House of the Devil, as any other House ever was. Nay, it is reasonable to think that the Play-houses in this Kingdom are a greater Pleasure to him than any*
Temple

Temple he ever had in the Heathen World. How he comes to be so well acquainted with the Devil's Taste I cannot imagine. But, if I may be allow'd to ghes at it, I should think he was far better pleas'd with that serious sincere Worship, accompanied with the most immoral intemperate Rites, which was paid him by the Heathens, under the Titles of *Venus, Bacchus, &c.* than he can be by an Assembly of *Christians*, who heartily detest him and all his Works; who are thoroughly convinc'd that the *Venus, the Bacchus, &c.* presented to their View, are the Likenesses of those false Gods which were worship'd by the Heathens of old; but which, at the same time, are so far from being rever'd and ador'd by these *Christians*, that they treat them with the utmost Contempt; use them to the same End they do Fools and Buffoons; to excite their Mirth, by the ridiculous Appearance of such a mock Representation. For my part, I cannot devise any means how a Set of false Gods can be treated with greater Contempt than they are upon these Occasions. But (says the Author) *what though Hymns and Adorations are not offer'd to impure and filthy Deities, yet if Impurity and Filthiness is the Entertainment; if immodest Songs, prophane Rant, if Lust and Passion entertain the Audience, the Business is the same, and the Assembly does the same Honour to the Devil, though they be not gather'd together in the Name of some Heathen God.*

Here lies the Stress of this whole Argument; and the Weight of it depends upon these Particulars; *first*, whether *Impurity and Filthiness be the Entertainment*; *secondly*, whether *the Audience be really entertain'd with immodest Songs and Lust*; and *thirdly*, if they should happen to be in such a taking, whether it amounts to as great a Sin, as *doing Honour to the Devil, in the Name of some Heathen God.*

To the *first*, I can only say that People of the best Breeding,

Breeding, the nicest Taste, and the most strict Virtue do not apprehend *Impurity and Filthiness to be generally in these Entertainments*, notwithstanding this Author affirms it so roundly. To the *second* (wherever the Author may have got his Information) the same good People are ready to assure him, that they neither are, nor ever go to be, *entertain'd with immodest Songs and Lust*. And as to the *third* Particular, before I can determine any thing, I must consider the Word *Lust* a little, of which our Author makes so great a Use throughout his whole Treatise. *Lust*, and *Passion*, and *Rant*, are the great Sins which he lays to the Charge of those who go to Plays. Whereas *Lust*, simply taken, can be no more a Sin than Hunger or Thirst; nor is it in any one's Power to prevent the one more than the others. They were certainly intended by our great Creator as a Means to continue and preserve his Creatures upon Earth: And therefore, in themselves, cannot be evil, unless they are abus'd to ill Purposes. They are necessary Appetites, and altogether innocent, as long as they crave after nothing but what is lawful: When they do otherwise, either one or t'other of them, they are criminal: As they are also, when abus'd to any Excess, even upon lawful Objects. Now, whoever have confess'd to our Author, that upon such Occasions they are inspired with Lust toward unlawful Objects, I grant it is sinful in such to go to Plays; and would advise them to stay away, till they have got rid of such an irregular Appetite; as I would also those who are apt to be troubled with the like Infirmary at Church. As for *Passion*, I can't think it a Sin to be present while another Person is *really* transported with it; much less, when we know he is only feigning and representing such *Passion*. And then, as for *Rant*, I take it to be — I don't know what; a sort of Nonsense, which, like

a Chip in Porridge, can neither do neither Good nor Hurt; nor consequently render any one *guilty* in happening to have the Drum of his Ear struck with it. Therefore I leave the Reader to judge, whether simple *Lust*, if any one should be overtaken with it; or *Passion*, if one should chance to see it represented; or *Rant*, if any one should be so unlucky as to hear it, do singly, or all compounded together, amount to as great a Sin as doing Honour to the Devil in the Name of some Heathen God. As for his Particularity in saying, *It is reasonable to think that the Play-houses in this Kingdom are a greater Pleasure to the Devil than any where else*, I take it to proceed from that partial Affection to old *England*, which some People have been so ambitious of shewing, for these last seven and thirty Years: For, if theatrical Entertainments are the Worship of the Devil, the best Judges will tell you he is better served at *Rome* and *Venice*, nay even at *Paris*, than he is at *London*.

But, to proceed with our Author's Reasoning; after having affirmed several times over, without any Proof, that going to a Play is going to worship the Devil, says he (p. 15.) *Thus it is in the Reason of the thing; and if we should now consider the State of our Play-house, as it is in Fact, we should find it answering all these Characters, and producing Effects suitable to its Nature. But I shall forbear this Consideration, it being as unnecessary to tell the Reader that our Play-house is in Fact the Sink of Corruption and Debauchery; that it is the general Rendezvous of the most profligate Persons of both Sexes; that it corrupts the Air, and turns the adjacent Places into public Nuisances; this is as unnecessary, as to tell him that the Exchange is a Place of Merchandize.*

This Author is never farther from the Point than when he talks of *Reasons* and *Facts*. That the Play-house is the Rendezvous of the most profligate Persons of both Sexes, I am ready to grant: But this is
an

an accidental Misfortune, lamented by the Generality of those that go to these Entertainments, and proceeding chiefly from the Negligence or perhaps Indulgence of those whom the Laws have appointed to remove and suppress such Irregularities. Suppose the Play-houses were no longer in being, and these profligate Persons should make our Churches their *Places of Rendezvous* (as, if they might be permitted, I make no Question but they would; and, as in *Spain* and *Portugal*, where they have not the Conveniences of Play-houses, they certainly do) must the Church be call'd the *House of the Devil* for this wicked, accidental Pollution of it, and be charg'd with *producing such bad Effects as suitable to its Nature?* No surely. Nor is there any more reason why the Play-house should. It is as unjustly charg'd with *corrupting the Air, and turning the adjacent Places into public Nuisances*. In what Sense it is suppos'd to *corrupt the Air* I cannot imagine; but I conclude his *public Nuisances* are the *profligate Persons* of the fair Sex, who are lodged thicker thereabouts than in any other Part of the Town; and this, I own, I should look upon as a Nuisance, if I were obliged to be an Inhabitant amongst them. But, as there are in all great Cities some peculiar Places more frequently inhabited by People of this Sort, (as at *Rome* particularly, where they are tolerated upon paying an extraordinary Tax to the *Pope*) so in *London* they have chosen to make the Neighbourhood of the Play-houses their chief Residence: not that I believe there is a lewd Woman more upon Account of Play-houses subsisting; but, from the Remissness of the Constables and such Officers, they find these more convenient Places to carry on their Trade in, than any other; any Crowd or large Company being their proper Element. The Grievance therefore arising from the Swarming of such Vermin about

C

the

the Play-houses, is not owing to the Nature of Plays, but to the Neglect of those whose Concern it is to cleanse the Town upon such Occasions, and to sweep away all such licentious Associates from the Assemblies of People of the best Condition.

Yet our Author goes on after his usual manner, charging *first* the Play-houses, and *then* all those that ever go to them, with being the Cause and Encouragers of *Vice and Debauchery*, and of all those *Disorders* which are committed by the most profligate and abandon'd Part of Mankind.

But as these Disorders are not occasioned by the innocent and virtuous Part of the Audience, such ought, by no means, to be charged with the Consequences of them. *Totus Mundus agit Histrionem.* The World is a Comedy; in which there are many very vicious and wicked People, both Actors and Spectators: Must therefore the *innocent* go out of Life, because there are some *lewd* in it? There are *Pleasures and Entertainments* which are very innocent and inoffensive, and yet may happen to be, at the same time, *the Pleasures and Entertainments of the most debauch'd People*: Must therefore honest People *detest and abhor* all such Entertainments? Our Author says so: but forgets that, by the same Rule, they must forbear eating and drinking, and all the most necessary and innocently delightful Actions in Life.

However, our Author fancies all the World would be of his Opinion, if the contrary were not in Fashion. For he proceeds thus; (p. 17.) *As Prejudices, the Force of Education, the Authority of Number, the Way of the World, the Example of great Names may make People believe* (fancy they believe;) *so the same Causes may make People act against all Sense and Reason, and be guilty of Practices, which no more suit with the Purity of their Religion, than Transubstantiation agrees with common Sense.* This is very true; for Example,

ample, as great an Absurdity as it is for an *English* Protestant to desire *Popery* and the *Pretender*, I have known some, blinded by the Delusions aforesaid, *believe and act against all Sense and Reason*, to such a Degree, as to refuse Allegiance to our present most gracious Sovereign, and employ the utmost of their Power, their Wishes, for a long Course of Years, in Favour of both these; two the most truly detestable Nufances in Life. But that People do *act against all Sense and Reason* in thinking Plays, in general, an honest laudable Diversion, I deny, for the Reasons I have before given; any more than they act against all Sense and Reason in going to Church: Since, in both these Places, unregulated and neglected, very great Immoralities may be practised. Which is no Reason that either should be totally abandoned; but only that whichever of them stands most in need of it, should be better disciplin'd and reform'd. I am far from being an Advocate for Corruption and Debauchery any where, but am clear, that the Argument is as strong against a Person's living in *London*, because the most debauch'd and profligate Persons of both Sexes live there, as against going to Plays for that Reason. I am for as much Reformation as can conveniently be had, in our Diversions, as well as our Devotions, and wish for it sincerely every Day of my Life: But, in the mean time, I stand amazed to think how it can enter into the Head of one who pretends to Reason, that either Church or Play-house, for want of such Reformation, should be totally abolish'd. None could ever desire the one but a wicked harden'd *Atheist*; and I can give no better a Name to him that endeavours the other, than that of a dogmatical, querulous *Atheatrist*.

I shall pass over our Author's Instance of *Trebonia* (p. 18.) because he owns *her Excuse may be allow'd where the Diversion is innocent*: and he has never yet

prov'd that going to Plays is not so. The Design of Peoples going thither is to improve in moral Graces, and a laudable Behaviour in the World; as much as the Design of going to Church is for Improvement in heavenly Grace and religious Virtues; and therefore, as I have demonstrated over and over, there is just as much Reason to forbear going to one as the other, because wicked People come there, and you are sometimes entertain'd with Rant, Passion, and Nonsense. If People go to either of these Places with an Intent to indulge themselves in any criminal Desire, they certainly do a wrong thing; but if not, how is it possible that the criminal Desires and Irregularities of others should be imputed to them?

P. 19. The Author, speaking of *Masquerades*, says, it is a *Diversion new in our Country*. Now there are many Reasons to make one think it is a very old one. I don't remember to have read of them before Cardinal *Woolsey's* time; tho' it is probable they were in Use long before. In the Reigns of the *Stuarts* they were very frequent. And tho' they were not in Vogue some time after the *Revolution*; yet toward the latter End of *Queen ANNE* (when some People were drunk at the imaginary Approach of *Popery* and *Slavery*) they were auspiciously reviv'd under the Administration and Conduct of the Duke *D'Aumont*; and from that *Æra* we may date their present Continuance among us: Which, as has been already observ'd by a most worthy Prelate of our Church, is one good Reason, among many others, why they should be hated and discountenanc'd by all true Lovers of their Country. Yet, upon this Ground, I suspect, it is that our Author speaks so favourably of them, as to say, there are *more and stronger Reasons for a constant Abhorrence of the Stage, than of Masquerades*.

He

He is as much mistaken (p. 20.) in his Instance of *Painting*; where he affirms that *Painting is a great Sin*; and takes it for granted that *the Use of Paint is always odious and sinful*: And tho' he owns there is *no exprefs Text of Scripture against Painting*; yet he says *in judging according to Scripture, People must hold it as unreasonable to paint sometimes, as to be sometimes malicious, indevout, proud, or false*. No sure; it can never be right to be either malicious, indevout, proud, or false: But since it is no where forbidden in Scripture, where can be the Harm in painting *sometimes*; provided it be done with a modest, and an humble Spirit, and for fear of appearing shockingly disagreeable in the Eyes of our Fellow-Christians? Why do People wash their Faces and dress their Heads, but to look pleasing and well upon each other: And why, for the same Reason, if the Nature of the thing requires it, should they not add a little Varnish to their Complexion; to make a fallow Skin look fresh and lively; and to conceal from the World a Face so unfortunately deform'd with Freckles, that it resembles the Belly of a Toad? Pray how comes *dying* the Face, only to make it more agreeable to the Spectators (for that I suppose to be the only Motive) to be a greater Sin than covering the rest of the Body with such a Variety of Dyes, as is generally the Fashion? If this Affectation of Colours proceeds from a mere *Vanity of Mind and Fondness of Beauty*, as I suppose it most commonly does, must it be call'd a *great Sin* for that? In what part of Scripture, I pray, are *Vanity of Mind and Fondness of Beauty* styl'd *great Sins*? And yet the Author's chief Ground for *condemning Painting as a great Sin*, is for its *proceeding from a Vanity of Mind only, and a Fondness of Beauty*. However, be it so, wearing colour'd Cloaths from the same Principles, must be equally as great a Sin: But where
neither

neither Face nor Body are cover'd with Colours, from any such wrong Motives, neither can be sinful. Yet our Author proceeds, (p. 21.) according to his usual Correctness, asserting that *Painting is contrary to Humility*. Whenever either *Painting* or *going to Plays* are us'd upon an ill Account, I shall be as ready to condemn them as he can be: but in the mean time, I affirm that both may be us'd, not only innocently, but to good Purposes. The Abuse of *Painting*, and of the *Stage* to ill Purposes, all reasonable People must abhor; but this is no reason why neither should ever be us'd at all; when one may be as innocently ornamental, as t'other may be innocently instructive.

But to proceed with him. (p. 22.) He says, *a polite Writer of a late Paper thought he had sufficiently ridicul'd a certain Lady's Pretensions to Piety; when, speaking of her Closet, he says,*

*Together lie her Prayer-book and Paint,
At once t'improve the Sinner and the Saint.*

Here again he has mistaken the Case; and introduc'd a Quotation at second hand, without knowing for what Purpose it was written, or quoted by the Author from whence he has taken it. This celebrated Couplet is Part of a Satyr, written by the late ingenious Earl of *Dorset*, to expose the Hypocrisy of a Woman who was a pretended Saint, but a real Sinner. Her using her *Prayer-book* for a Pretence to Piety, and her *Paint* for an Improvement in Sin, justly and equally make her the Subject of Satyr and Ridicule: they were both abus'd. Neither does Sir *Richard Steele*, the Author of that *Spectator*, (N^o 79.) quote those Verses to any other Purpose than to expose those Ladies (not any *certain Lady*) who are so silly as to mix their Devotions with their Vanities,

Vanities, Dresses and Diversions. He does not pretend to shew that *Religion* and *Painting* are incompatible in the same Person, but only that the Exercise of them is inconsistent at the same Time. He thinks it does not look well to see the *Prayer-book* and *Paint* lie upon the same Table. He has not a single Word against mere *Painting* in that whole Paper: Tho' one would think, from what this Author says of him, that he had employ'd the best part of that *Spectator* in inveighing against it.

The Author, having compleated what he calls his Arguments, proceeds (p. 23.) and says, *I shall now make a Reflection or two upon the present celebrated Entertainment of the Stage, which is so much to the Taste of this Christian Country, that it has been acted almost every Night this whole Season, I mean Apollo and Daphne.* Now, tho' I am far from setting up for an Advocate of this celebrated Entertainment, knowing nothing of it indeed, but only that it pleases the Generality of People, and displeases our Author; yet I'll venture a Wager that we find him as much mistaken in his Reflections upon this in particular, as he has been in his Condemnation of Stage Entertainments in general.

He begins, p. 23. *The First Scene is said to be, a magnificent Palace discover'd: Venus attended with Graces and Pleasures.* Now how is it possible that such a Scene as this should be fit for the Entertainment of Christians? &c. The very proposing such a Scene as this, supposes the Audience to be fit for the Entertainment of Lust and Wantonness. Can the Wit of Man invent any thing more contrary to our Religion, than an Entertainment from Venus attended with her Pleasures? &c. Such a Scene is much fitter to debauch a Christian Audience, than a Scene of Cursing and Blaspheming. To this I answer, that simply to represent Venus and her Pleasures to the Eye, can be no more contrary to Religion, than barely naming them to the Ear would

would be; there must be something immodest and shocking either in the Action or Discourse, to make either one or the other Offensive. I take *Venus and her Pleasures*, as here represented, to be as innocent as a Picture in which half a Dozen beautiful Women are figur'd, or as a History in which they are describ'd only. Yet one would think, by the Author's Account of this Matter, that the Person who represents this *Venus* was actually possess'd of a Secret Power (such as was attributed to the Heathen *Venus* of old) of inspiring People's Minds with amorous Sentiments: And not only so, but that her mere Presence could influence the Spectators to such a Degree, as to make them fall to embracing and enjoying each other upon the Spot. For what but such a Notion as this could make a Man so angry with a few mute Figures? and compare those that behold them *to the Idolaters of old*? What does all this raving amount to? Does any one worship these Deities among us? or look upon them to be any thing but mere Pageants? Yet, says our Author, *how are we more enlighten'd than the Heathens of old, if none of us considereth in his Heart, neither is there Knowledge nor Understanding in us to say, These are the filthy Deities of the Devil's Invention, with which he polluted and defil'd the Heathen World; (Who supposes they are any thing else?) and shall we still preserve their Power amongst us? Shall we make such Abominations our Diversion? Yes surely; what should we make of them, but our sport and ridicule? What can we do better with such mock Deities, but laugh at them? and sometimes stare a little; and admire, how any People could ever be so stupid as to be serious in their Worship of them? Yet this poor Man supposes the Audience to be assembled together with great Sincerity, to celebrate the Power of Venus, as a real Goddess. Baal (says he) is as fit for our Devotions, as Venus is for our Rejoicings and Praises,*

Praises. Nay he carries it so far as to say (p. 24.) that the very naming such a Scene as this is unlawful Language, and carries as great a Contrariety to our Religion as the Worship of Baal. At that rate, what has he been doing all this while, who has nam'd it so often? And indeed one may venture to affirm that the Generality of the Audience were no more inspir'd with *Lust and Wantonness* upon seeing this mock *Venus and her Pleasures*, than our Author was in Writing of them, and others will be in Reading of them.

But now he comes closer to the Point, and introduces two Women (whom he supposes to be baptiz'd Christians) representing *Venus and Diana* in this Language,

Ven. *Amorous Kisses,*
 Dian. *Nuptial Blissés,*
 { *Lover's Pleasures,*
 { *Cupid's Treasures,*
 { *Are the Sweets that Life improve.*

This he imagines to be such obscene Language as to be fit for none to hear but *Rakes and Prostitutes*. Why so, I pray? does not every one know that the *Pleasures of Love* are really and truly very sweet, and very great *Improvers* of the Happiness of Life, and may, at the same time, be very innocent? Are not *nuptial Blissés* very honest allowable Delights? And are not *amorous kisses* known to be a Part of them? These jingling Words contain no more than what the Audience all knew before ever they heard them sung there. That *Love's a sweet Pleasure* is one of the most notorious Maxims in Life; as well as, that *Pleasure* is the most desirable Thing in Nature. *The Ways of Wisdom are Ways of Pleasantness*. Nor are Pleasures ever the less worthy Objects of a Wise
 D Man's

Man's Pursuit, because Rakes and Fools will take unlawful Ways to come at them. One would think the Author of these Rhymes had sufficiently guarded against any sinister Interpretation of the *Blisses* he speaks of, by calling them *nuptial*; yet our candid ingenuous Author is resolv'd to forget this, and calls it *singing the Praises of Debauchery*, (p. 25.) and *hearing the Praises of Lewdness*. But he makes me laugh, to see him so seriously supposing that all this ridiculous Mockery is a direct and real Worship of the antiquated Goddess *Venus*. *No Christian* (says he) *need be told that Venus and her Graces are as much the Devil's Machinery, as Witches and Imps*. I will suppose, for once, there were actually existing such Things as *Venus and her Graces, Witches and Imps*, presenting themselves to the View of a great Number of Spectators, and singing what you please; would it be impossible for these Spectators to preserve their Christian Purity of Heart all the while? Is it any ways necessary that they should relish and entertain the same Sentiments, which are contain'd in such Songs? Nothing like it. But here the Case is otherwise. A poor mean Mortal, known to all the Spectators to be such, personates a Goddess, worship'd by the Heathens of old with such a Worship, as these Spectators are convinc'd was false, ridiculous and immodest. This poor Mortal affirms in a Song, that the *Pleasures of Love are sweet*; without giving the least hint that she means unlawful Love; (the contrary being directly express'd.) And yet our Author accuses *her* for inspiring, and the Audience for being inspir'd with, *Lust, Lewdness, and Debauchery*; and tells them they are no better than a Parcel of *Rakes and Prostitutes* for being present at such an Entertainment. I think it proper, upon this Occasion, to put our Author in Mind, that the Ancients did not always understand the Word *Venus*, by which they

they express'd the Attribute of Beauty, in a bad Sense, so as to intend something lascivious, but very often in a modest and a good one. Hence are derived the Words *venustas*, *veneror*, *veneratio*, applied by them, and by us us'd, to express that Regard which is claim'd by the most deservedly amiable and divine Objects.

The other Jingle, upon which he falls so outrageously (p. 26.) is so much of the same Nature with the foregoing, that all the same may well be said in Defence of it. The Nature of such Ballads, when the worst is said of them that can be, is that they have a Tendency to excite kind Inclinations in the Breasts of amorous People, toward the Objects of their Love: which, when such Love is plac'd where it ought to be, is far enough from being an ill Office. And, if it happens to be wrong placed, that cannot be imputed to the chinking of a few insipid Words, but flows from the irregular cravings of an ungovern'd Passion; such as incontinent People do not catch in this or that particular Place, but carry about with them where-ever they go.

Our Author next falls very heavily upon *Bacchus*, *Pan*, and *Silenus*, attended with *Satyrs*, *Fawns*, and *Silvans*; and asks, *what have Christians to do with this Company?* I answer; to laugh at them; to wonder how the Heathen World could be sunk so low in Stupidity, as ever to make such ridiculous Beings the Objects of their religious Worship; and, in the Joy of their Hearts, to thank God that they know better. Yet our Author goes on upon his old false *Hypothesis*, concluding the Audience is assembled together out of a religious Respect to these whimsical *Chimeras*, and are as much prejudic'd in favour of their Divinity, as the Heathens of old were. *If this is not being at the Devil's Table, (says he) he had no Table in the Heathen World.* If it is, then our

Author, and all that ever taught and learn'd the History of these Demi-Gods, have been at *the Devil's Table* likewise. For what is this more than a bare Character of their Persons presented to our View, with their proper Symbols and Ornaments, in somewhat a more lively Manner than it is done by Father *Montfaucon*, in his *Antiquity Explain'd*. The Attributes of these impure Deities are indeed describ'd by some sort of Action upon the Stage, but not acted in reality; tho' our Author argues upon a Supposition that they are. To hear and see these shadowy Descriptions, he says, is as great a Sin as *making a Jest of the Sacraments*. (p. 27.) *It may be* (says he) *you could not sit in the Play-house, if you saw Baptism made a Jest of, and it's Use reproach'd*. No certainly; but sure a Christian may sit there, properly enough, to see Heathenism, with all its Rites and Ceremonies, made a Jest of.

To p. 30. he goes on begging the Question, as usual, and supposing that the Audience give their Money to the Players, purely to be criminal and wicked upon the Stage: which is all Mistake. For tho' *Venus*, and *Silenus*, talk like themselves, yet, I presume, they act nothing shocking to the most modest Eyes. And what does this amount to, more than such a Description of their Natures, as is to be met with in the Antient Mythology? Such as the Fathers of old, not only read, but have written so much about; and that in Language a thousand times more obscene, than ever was utter'd in the Play-house: Such as the most grave and learned Divines in all ages have been conversant with, and such as is daily inculcated into our Youth of the best Condition, as the only Means of attaining a polite Education. Yet, to be a Spectator at a Representation of this very thing, our Author calls *serving the Devil*; and says, *If there be any certain Marks of the Devil's*

Devil's Power, or Presence, in any Assemblies, Places, or Temples of the Heathen World, the same are as certain Marks of his Power and Presence in our Play-house.

The Author having done with his Reflections and Arguments, proceeds to apply them in the Cases of *Levis, Jucunda, &c.* But, as all this is grounded upon his mistaken Supposition, that the Players do really commit all those Sins which they only Paint out and Characterise upon the Stage, and that therefore it is absolutely unlawful to go to Plays, I shall pass it over without any farther Remarks; leaving it to the Reader's Judgment, whether, as I have stated the Case, it may not be as innocent to go to a Play, as to any other Recreation.

As to his Quotation out of Archbishop Tillotson, (p. 38.) which he tells us he produces *for no other End, but to prevent the Charge of Uncharitableness*; I must assure him that it will by no means serve him to that End. The Archbishop is far enough from decrying Plays in *general*; he only particularizes, *As Plays are now order'd, As now the Stage is, &c.* The notoriously debauch'd Reigns of *Charles* and *James* the Seconds, (when Profaneness was the Wit, and Lewdness the Gallantry of the Court) very naturally drew the Stage into the same vicious Taste; and this was what so justly provok'd the Zeal of that good Archbishop. He, no where, condemns Theatrical Performances in *general*; nor says, it is impossible that Players can be Christians; as our Author so frequently has done: and for which, the Use of this great Name will never clear him from the Charge of Uncharitableness.

The Clergy of the true Church (as they affect to call themselves) in the two Reigns beforemention'd, were too loyal to make much bustle about the Immorality of the Stage, for fear they should give a Handle

to Men of Republican Principles forsooth, to impute the Iniquity of the Times to the Influence of the Court; so they, very discretely, waited till after the *Revolution*: When Mr. Rowe's honest Tragedy of *Tamerlane*, form'd upon the Plan of Liberty, gave the Reverend Mr. Collier such a Disgust to the Stage, that he was convinc'd its *Vices* and *Immoralities* were no longer to be born. The Comedy call'd *the Non-juror*, which so justly and wittily exposes the wretched Schemes of that absurd Sect, extorted a *Serious Remonstrance* from the Reverend Mr. Bedford; And, the best of our Plays, being frequently honour'd and encourag'd by the Presence of the Royal Family, as well as the most honourable and worthy of the King's Subjects, out steps the Reverend Mr. Law, and undertakes *fully to demonstrate the absolute Unlawfulness of the Stage-Entertainment*: which he does; *First*, by affirming very positively and roundly, that the Play-house is the Temple of the Devil; *Secondly*, by asserting very charitably and dogmatically, that the Players are actually guilty of all that Villany and Wickedness which they there represent; and *Thirdly*, by concluding very respectfully and civilly, that all who go to see them, without Exception, are at least as guilty; by being Partakers in and Promoters of such a Complication of abominable and detestable Sins. For (p. 37.) he has these Words, *The Use and Encouragement of the Stage, is a deliberate, continued, open and public Declaration in favour of Lewdness, Immorality and Prophaneness*. The Infination that is couch'd in such a bold but groundless Allegation as this, must be obvious to every honest Mind.

That there are in some Plays things Scandalous and Offensive, I am ready to grant; and should be glad to see them so distinguish'd, by a judicious impartial Hand, as to bring those Plays into Disuse,
'till

'till the offending Parts should be left out of them. But that Plays in general, and especially Representations of the Heathen Gods, in the ludicrous Way in which we represent them, are sinful and antichristian, I can by no Means agree; without condemning the Fathers, our two famous Universities, all Schools and Nurseries of Learning, the best Authors Ancient and Modern, and all the Christian Churches in the Universe. And therefore, tho' I am as much for the Reformation of the Stage from all the Irregularities and Abuses of it, as the most strict Advocate for the Honour of our Holy Religion can be, yet, for the Reasons before-mention'd, I cannot think a total Abolition of it would be right; or indeed so much as Practicable.

And thus I have complied with our Author in what he thinks (p. 50.) *reasonable People* ought to do in this Case. As I cannot see, much less yield to, the Truth of his Arguments, whereby he pretends to have prov'd that *the Use of the Stage is certainly to be reckon'd among great and flagrant Sins*; I have answer'd them; and given my Reasons for the contrary Opinion; in a Manner however Slight and Hasty, yet I hope sufficient to keep the Minds of the Tender and Innocent from being drawn into a mistaken Apprehension of Guilt; to preserve the noble and instructive Diversion of Stage-Entertainments, well regulated, from being totally banish'd and exploded; and, in the mean Time, to prevail with those who have no Taste for such Pleasures themselves, to judge charitably of others; who innocently, both in the Intention and Consequence, make such Entertainments the Amusement of their Leisure Hours.

F I N I S.